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NSC FOR NEA STAFF

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HQ USAF FOR XXXX
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CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

1. Mideast
2. Iran

Key stories in the media:

Israel Radio reported that Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice will arrive in Israel on Saturday and meet with FM Tzipi Livni. The

station said that on Sunday Rice will hold separate meetings with PM Ehud Olmert, Defense Minister Amir Peretz, and PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas. The tripartite talks will take place on Monday. The Jerusalem Post and Maariv quoted Olmert as saying in Ankara that cutting ties with Abbas is out of the question. This morning Israel Radio reported that, in an interview with Al Arabiya-TV, Secretary Rice urged Olmert and Abbas to start discussing the establishment of a Palestinian state, and quoted her as saying that she hopes that the issue will be raised during the upcoming talks.

All media reported that the Hamas cabinet resigned on Thursday to make way for a coalition with the rival Fatah party of Abbas, who gave his blessing despite what his aides said was a warning by the US that Washington would shun the new coalition. Abbas presided over the ceremony in which PM Ismail Haniyeh of Hamas submitted the resignation of his cabinet after months of stop-and-go power-sharing negotiations and asked him, as head of a caretaker government, to form a Hamas-Fatah coalition within five weeks. In his letter of appointment, Abbas said the new government must respect international agreements, a wording that implies acceptance of Israel but falls short of international demands of an explicit recognition. Abbas was also quoted as saying that he was extending the three weeks he had given Haniyeh to form the new cabinet to five weeks.

Ha'aretz and Israel Radio reported that State Department Spokesman Sean McCormack would not confirm the report of a possible US boycott, saying only that the US will not judge a Palestinian government until it has been formed, and its performance reviewed. The Jerusalem Post reported that PA officials confirmed that the US has informed Abbas it will boycott all the ministers in the unity government. The Jerusalem Post quoted chief PA negotiator Saeb Erekat as saying that Washington was insisting that any government meets the three conditions of the Quartet. The Jerusalem Post reported that a senior PA official told the newspaper: "We are aware of Washington's threat, but we had no other choice. President Abbas will try to persuade US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice during their meeting next week that the new government will honor all the previous agreements with Israel." Ha'aretz reported that on Thursday US Consul-General in Jerusalem Jacob Wallis met with Abbas and made it clear that the US would boycott the unity government because of its refusal to recognize Israel explicitly. Ha'aretz reported that on Thursday Palestinian sources told the newspaper that the crisis that almost sabotaged the government's resignation announcement was solved in a telephone call between Abbas and Hamas political chief Khaled Mashal in Damascus.

All media reported that Turkish PM Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced on Thursday during a joint press conference with Olmert in Ankara that a delegation led by Turkey's Ambassador to Israel would visit the site of the Mugrabi Ascent in the near future. The delegation will investigate whether the walkway causes damage to the foundations of Al-Aqsa Mosque and the holy sites on the Temple Mount. The media said that Olmert agreed to the Turkish delegation's visit, because "Israel has nothing to hide." He was also quoted as saying: "We shall cooperate with everyone and we will be happy to host the delegation, in order to show that the Israeli version is correct and accurate." Israel's Sephardi Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar was quoted as saying in an interview published on Thursday in the Shas party's mouthpiece Yom Leyom that the digs are a "superfluous provocation."

Ha'aretz quoted Olmert as saying at a meeting with Israeli reporters in Ankara on Thursday that Iran is not as close to developing nuclear weapons as it claims. Yediot quoted Turkish PM Erdogan as saying on Thursday that Turkey will not allow Iran to produce enriched uranium for military purposes. The Jerusalem Post detailed the heavy financial costs involved in fighting against Iran militarily. The Jerusalem Post reported that Andrei Demidov, currently Russia's top diplomat in Israel, has told the newspaper that Russia believes it is "crucial" to have a nuclear-free Iran. The newspaper said that Demidov was distancing himself from those saying that a nuclear Iran is inevitable.

Ha'aretz reported that US Senator Barack Obama (Illinois), who is competing for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination, told the newspaper on Thursday that the US should help protect Israel

from its sworn enemies. Ha'aretz wrote that Obama intends to present his policy regarding Israel soon, and that his staff has been drafting a speech. Obama was quoted as saying in the interview: "In my opinion, the special relationship between the US and Israel obliges us to help it look for serious partners with whom it can make peace agreements. At the same time, we must help Israel defend itself against those enemies that have sworn to destroy it." Ha'aretz said that in his speech he intends to remove any doubts the Democratic Party's donors and constituents, many of whom are Jewish, may have about his support for Israel in his speech. "Israel wants peace with its neighbors more than anything else," he was quoted as saying.

Ha'aretz said that an analysis of testimonies and investigation reports, some of which were available to the Winograd Commission probing the second Lebanon war, suggests that while the Air Force and the intelligence branches focused on Hizbullah's arsenal of medium- and long-range rockets, dealing with Hizbullah rockets was neglected.

The Jerusalem Post reported that a number of Israeli academics -- including author Yitzhak Laor, filmmaker Eyal Sivan, and historian Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin -- are taking a leading role in the four-day "Israeli Apartheid Week" in London, eliciting criticism from the Board of Deputies of British Jews.

Hatzofe reported that Jewish communities in the US have contributed USD 2.5 million to the rehabilitation of the evacuees of the Gaza Strip's Gush Katif.

Ha'aretz quoted Olmert as saying in Ankara on Thursday that Israel does not intend to intervene in moves by the US Congress toward recognition of the Armenian genocide.

Ha'aretz reported that Adalah - The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel has presented to a UN commission in Geneva a strongly worded report about Israel's policy vis-a-vis its Arab citizens. The newspaper said that the move is intended to form the basis for an investigation into whether Israel respects the charter against racial discrimination.

The Jerusalem Post reported that too much publicity may jeopardize plans by Saudi Prince Al-Walid bin Talal to build an eight-story hotel in Tel Aviv together with the Abulafia family of Jaffa.

The media reported that Likud MK and former health minister Danny Naveh is likely to retire from politics and join the business world.

All media reported on, and most led with, the story that the Zeiler Commission report into police failures surrounding the reputed Parinyan crime family, due on Sunday, recommends the dismissal of police officers and sharply criticizes the current police chief, Moshe Karadi.

1. Mideast:

Summary:

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "[Messages from Ehud Olmert's bureau indicate that] there will be no talks on the permanent settlement, no negotiations under US mediation, no avoidance of the Roadmap."

Palestinian affairs correspondent Avi Issacharoff wrote in Ha'aretz: "A summit with no results will only help the Hamas enlist more supporters."

Political parties correspondent Nadav Eyal wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv: "The first aim of the Israelis and Americans will be to force Abu Mazen to clarify his agreements with Hamas, and these clarifications will 'put him back among the good guys.'"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "Prematurely relieving pressure will reduce the prospects for the

real change in Syrian behavior that would be the objective of any peace process."

Block Quotes:

I. "He's a Nay-Sayer"

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (2/16): "Tough messages begin to emerge from the Prime Minister's Bureau, which make clear what will not happen at the February summit: There will be no talks on the permanent settlement, no negotiations under US mediation, no avoidance of the Roadmap. Olmert invites his senior ministers to the summit, so that they will not present independent plans to Rice, and so he will come across as having the country's best interests at heart and as taking part in decisions. But that's not enough. At night Olmert dreams about an encouraging note from Ariel Sharon that he found in his desk drawer. When things get rough and the pressure mounts, his predecessor wrote him, trust the Palestinians to get you out of the jam. They will always do something idiotic that will save you."

II. "Summit of Doubts"

Palestinian affairs correspondent Avi Issacharoff wrote in Ha'aretz (2/16): "Though Washington is saying that the unity government must fulfill the Quartet's demands, it has been emphasizing that the new government will be evaluated first of all by its deeds, and that it is not rushing to dismiss the Mecca accord outright. According to Palestinian sources, the reason is the United States' desire not to hurt Saudi Arabia or to enter into a confrontation with it. Thus far the Americans have preferred to transmit messages to Abu Mazen that clarify, though not openly, their negative attitude toward the idea of unity, but they are not coming out with aggressive statements against Saudi King Abdullah's support of it. Even if the summit fails, Hamas can be pleased.... A summit with no results will only help the Hamas enlist more supporters. In the meantime, the organization is evincing considerable suspicion toward the PA Chairman's actions. Hamas's greatest concern is that Abu Mazen will ultimately succumb to American pressure, and that immediately after PA Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh submits his resignation, the chairman will find an excuse and avoid appointing him prime minister in the unity government."

III. "Summit of Despair"

Political parties correspondent Nadav Eyal wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (2/16): "This is a summit to which everybody is limping out of breath. It will not have the atmosphere of a summit, and the efforts to endow it with a touch of formality are doomed to failure.... The first aim of the Israelis and Americans will be to force Abu Mazen to clarify his agreements with Hamas, and these clarifications will 'put him back among the good guys.' He will have to clarify, for example, whether he will still be able, even in a unity government, to submit a permanent settlement to a referendum of the Palestinian electorate. That was the agreement before he embarked upon his love affair with Hamas. The Israelis are holding this summit in spite of their disappointment over Mecca, for in their rosy dreams senior Kadima figures are hoping for 'dramatic progress,' which will lead to a 'historic agreement' over a 'courageous political step,' which will include 'painful concessions,' and other developments of this kind which will grant the government a breathing space.... There are some who are watching this with less enthusiasm. 'It seems to me,' said [conservative Strategic Affairs Minister] Avigdor Lieberman cautiously, 'that it is other things that Olmert needs right now. The only thing which has to be done at next week's summit is to present Condoleezza Rice with the fact that the Palestinian unity government agreement is a Hamas dictate, that Abu Mazen has spat in the Americans' face. Negotiations on a permanent settlement? If they start opening maps it will be a problem for us, but we have already seen a lot of photo opportunities in the past. Believe me, it's all theoretical.'"

IV. "Pressure the Rogues"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (2/16): "Syria's proposal to Israel, if there is one, is 'you talk to me while I shoot at you and your American allies.' There is nothing

particularly tempting about such an offer, even aside from the question of whether any conceivable deal with Syria could be worthwhile. Assad is essentially offering to remove the pressure on himself, in the form of the UN investigation into the assassinations of Rafiq Hariri and Pierre Gemayel, without ending his proxy warfare against Israel and the US. Rather than accepting Assad's 'offer,' the alternative is for the West to see Syria and Iran in the context of what has happened with Libya and North Korea.... if we want to see real, meaningful concessions from Syria or Iran, then the West has to show it can turn up the diplomatic and economic heat, and can keep turning it up if they choose to 'retaliate.' The US and Israel, then, are not in conflict with respect to Syria, but in the same boat. Prematurely relieving pressure will reduce the prospects for the real change in Syrian behavior that would be the objective of any peace process. By the same token, continuing to turn up the pressure on Damascus will not squander opportunities but create them."

¶2. Iran:

Summary:

Deputy Managing Editor and right-wing columnist Caroline B. Glick wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "By sending a message of weakness now, in order to purchase maneuvering time that may not be obtained, the US this week has accelerated rather than distanced the moment of truth."

Block Quotes:

"Bush's Inevitable Showdown"

Deputy Managing Editor and right-wing columnist Caroline B. Glick wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (2/16): "President George W. Bush asserted Wednesday that the State Department achieved with North Korea in the six-party talks 'will bring us closer to a Korean Peninsula that is free of nuclear weapons.' But it is hard to see how this is so.... Kim [Jong-il] understands that the only way he can remain in power is to force the international community to subsidize his tyranny. The only way he can get foreign powers to do that is by using nuclear blackmail. By removing his banking sanctions, the US effectively destroyed its only effective bargaining chip against North Korea and so ensured that Kim's brinkmanship will continue.... By sending a message of weakness now, in order to purchase maneuvering time that may not be obtained, the US this week has accelerated rather than distanced the moment of truth while doing nothing to build support or increase its chances of triumph when the inevitable occurs."

JONES